

Appendix F: Background and Chronology

On November 13, 2001, Administrator Christine Todd Whitman directed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to undertake an Environmental Indicators Initiative (EII), bringing together national, regional, and program office indicator efforts to produce a Draft Report on the Environment (ROE) and a Draft Report on the Environment Technical Document (ROE TD). This report is the first step in a multi-year process to identify indicators to measure progress toward environmental and human health goals, to identify data gaps and discuss challenges in filling those gaps, and to ensure the Agency's accountability to the public. The ROE TD contains the scientific and technical information from which the ROE was developed.

Report Leadership/Partnerships

Administrator Whitman's chief of staff assembled and chaired a steering committee, comprising senior career officials from EPA program, support, and regional offices, to guide the report development. The Offices of Environmental Information (OEI) and Research and Development (ORD) were charged with leading an integrated process to produce the ROE and the ROE TD. Key staff representatives acted as "theme" or chapter leads, serving as liaisons with subject matter experts throughout EPA. Other federal agencies and tribal and state governments also assisted in reviewing the report and draft development.

Report Foundation-The Questions

The process began with a concerted effort across EPA to identify significant environmental questions both of interest to the public and fundamental to EPA's mission to protect the environment and human health. A series of six workshops was held in early 2002 across EPA program and regional offices for six themes: human health, ecological condition, air, water, land, and global issues. The workshops identified key questions and proposed indicators (both those supported by existing data and potential future indicators), and noted challenges to implementation and limitations of the indicators.

The questions focused on "outcomes" – actual environmental results such as the quality of outdoor air – rather than on more process-oriented "outputs" such as numbers of permits written. The questions included in this report represent a first set that can be refined and expanded. For some questions, one to several indicators were identified; for other questions, there were no indicators available or recommended.

Indicator Selection

By May 2002, the process had identified key questions and associated indicators to address them. The questions were organized into five report chapters: Cleaner Air, Purer Water, Better Protected Land, Human Health, and Ecological Condition. Indicators to respond to the questions were recommended from across EPA, states, tribes, and other federal agencies. The indicators and their supporting data sets were documented in accordance with a standard format, which is allowed for technical review of data quality, sampling design, coverage, data analysis, and data accessibility. An example of the quality review form is presented in Appendix G. For the national indicators that were identified, there was a wide variation in the availability of data, as the lack of data was a major challenge and limitation in writing the chapters.

An expert review was held to review and assess the potential indicators. External EPA experts were invited to participate in a two-day workshop in mid-June 2002 in the Washington, D.C. area, to discuss and record their assessments of the indicators. The reviewers were asked to evaluate the quality review forms for the proposed indicators in advance of the workshop and then to discuss their assessments in small groups of other reviewers at the workshop (an expert review evaluation form is presented in Appendix H).

Guidance was given to the expert reviewers asking that they review the proposed indicators to evaluate:

- Quality of the data set supporting the indicator;
- Scientific basis for the use of the indicator as a measure of the quality of the environment;
- Utility of the indicator in measuring the quality of the environment; and
- Limitations in using the indicator to measure the quality of the environment.

Draft Report Development and Review

After determining a set of indicators, EPA developed and refined several drafts of the report. In November 2002, EPA shared a draft with federal and state agencies and the Environmental Council of States (ECOS) and took their comments into consideration in developing the content of the ROE technical document. That draft was the basis for final review and comment by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

This current draft report is now available to the public.

Chronology of Significant Events for Document Development

A chronology of significant milestones in the development of the draft Report on the Environment Technical Document is presented below.

November 2001	Administrator's Memo Launching the Environmental Indicators Initiative
January-February 2002	Theme Workshop Meetings – Initial Identification of Questions and Potential Indicators
March-April 2002	Development of Report Outlines
April 2002	ECOS-Sponsored Meeting with Interested States
May 2002	Quality Review Process
June 2002	External Expert Review Workshop
July 2002-May 2003	Drafting of ROE and ROE Technical Document
Nov. 2002-May 2003	State/Federal Interagency/OMB/CEQ Review Meetings
June 2003	Release of Draft ROE and ROE Technical Document

